ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE MENTORING PRACTICES

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For mentoring information, please call (800) 444-3066 (California Only)
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Background:

In 1989, The National Mentoring Partnership (formerly The One to One Partnership, Inc.) and United Way of America convened a representative group of both national and community-based nonprofit organizations with significant experience in running mentoring programs. These leaders met regularly to discuss issues and practices which are emerging in their mentoring programs, focusing especially on how to promote the growth of responsible mentoring programs. They defined responsible mentoring programs as those which meet the needs of both the mentored participants and the volunteer mentors.

One of the most pressing needs identified by this group was for a set of guidelines, or common principles, to help guide the development of responsible mentoring programs. With this in mind, a volunteer subgroup the National Mentoring Working Group -- was formed in May 1990. It refined the full group's discussion of responsible mentoring into the elements of effective practice, which follow.

These **elements of effective practice** present program elements and policies that **have proven effective** in a wide range of existing mentoring settings. This brochure is available to any individual or organization wanting to develop, operate, volunteer in, or fund a mentoring program.

Responsible Mentoring:

- Is a structured, one-to-one relationship or partnership that focuses on the needs of the mentored participant.
- Fosters caring and supportive relationships.
- Encourages individuals to develop to their fullest potential.
- Helps an individual to develop his or her own vision for the future.
- Is a strategy to develop active community partnerships.

A Responsible Mentoring Program Requires:

- A well-defined mission and established operating principles.
- Regular, consistent contact between the mentor and the participant.
- Support by the family or guardian of the participant.
- Additional community support services.
- An established organization of oversight.
- Adherence to general principles of volunteerism.

- Paid or volunteer staff with appropriate skills.
- Written job descriptions for all staff and volunteer positions.
- Adherence to EEO requirements.
- Inclusiveness of racial, economic, and gender representation as appropriate to the program.
- Adequate financial and in-kind resources.
- Written administrative and program procedures.
- Written eligibility requirements for program participants.
- Program evaluation and ongoing assessment.
- A long-range plan that has community input.
- Risk management and confidentiality policies.
- Use of generally accepted accounting practices.
- A prudent and reasonable rationale for staffing requirements that is based on:
  - the organization's statement of purpose and goals
  - the needs of mentors and participants
  - community resources
  - staff and other volunteers' skill level.

A Nuts and Bolts Checklist for Mentoring Programs

Does your program have the following?

1. **A statement of purpose** and **long-range plan** that includes:

   - Who, what, where, when, why and how activities will be performed.
   - Input from originators, staff, funders, potential volunteers, and participants.
   - Assessment of community need.
   - Realistic, attainable, and easy-to-understand operational plan.
   - Goals, objectives, and timelines, for all aspects of the plan.
   - Funding and resource development plan.

2. **A recruitment plan for both mentors and participants** that includes:

   - Strategies that portray accurate expectations and benefits.
   - Year-round marketing and public relations.
   - Targeted outreach based on participants' needs.
   - Volunteer opportunities beyond mentoring.
   - A basis in your program's statement of purpose and long-range plan.

3. **An orientation for mentors and participants** that includes:

   - Program overview.
   - Description of eligibility, screening process, and suitability requirements.
   - Level of commitment expected (time, energy, flexibility).
   - Expectations and restrictions (accountability).
   - Benefits and rewards they can expect.
   - A separate focus for potential mentors and participants.
   - A summary of program policies, including written reports, interviews, evaluation, and reimbursement.

4. **Eligibility screening for mentors and participants** that includes:

- An application process and review.
- A face-to-face interview and home visit.
- Reference checks for mentors, which may include character references, child abuse registry check, driving record checks, and criminal record checks where legally permissible.
- Suitability criteria that relate to the program statement of purpose and needs of the target population. Could include some or all of the following: personality profile; skills identification; gender; age; language and racial requirements; level of education; career interests; motivation for volunteering; and academic standing.
- Successful completion of pre-match training and orientation.

5. **A readiness and training curriculum** for all mentors and participants that includes:

- Trained staff developers.
- Orientation to the program and resource network, including information and referral, other supportive services, and schools.
- Skills development as appropriate.
- Cultural/heritage sensitivity and appreciation training.
- Guidelines for participants on how to get the most out of the mentoring relationship.
- Do's and Don'ts of relationship management.
- Job and role descriptions.
- Confidentiality and liability information.
- Crisis management/problem solving resources.
- Communications skills development.
- Ongoing sessions as necessary.

6. **A matching strategy** that includes:

- A link with the program's statement of purpose.
- A commitment to consistency.
- A grounding in the program's eligibility criteria.
- A rationale for the selection of this particular matching strategy from the wide range of available models.
- Appropriate criteria for matches, including some or all of the following: gender; age; language requirements; availability; needs; interests; preferences of volunteer and participant; life experience; temperament.
- A signed statement of understanding that both parties agree to the conditions of the match and the mentoring relationship.
- Pre-match social activities between mentor and participant pools.
- Team building activities to reduce the anxiety of the first meeting.

7. **A monitoring process** that includes:

- Consistent, scheduled meetings with staff, mentors, and participants.
- A tracking system for ongoing assessment.
- Written records.

- Input from community partners, family, and significant others.
- A process for managing grievances, praise, re-matching, interpersonal problem solving, and premature relationship closure.

8. **A support, recognition, and retention** component that includes:

- A formal kick-off event.
- Ongoing peer support groups for volunteers, participants, and others.
- Ongoing training and development.
- Relevant issue discussion and information dissemination.
- Networking with appropriate organizations.
- Social gatherings of different groups as needed.
- Annual recognition and appreciation event.
- Newsletters or other mailings to participants, mentors, supporters, and funders.

9. **Closure steps** that include:

- Private and confidential exit interviews to de-brief the mentoring relationship between:
  - participant and staff.
  - mentor and staff.
  - mentor and participant without staff.
- Clearly stated policy for future contacts.
- Assistance for participants in defining next steps for achieving personal goals.

10. **An evaluation process** based on:

- Outcome analysis of program and relationship.
- Program criteria and statement of purpose.
- Information needs of board, funders, community partners, and other supporters of the program.

The National Mentoring Working Group:

Baltimore Mentoring Institute
Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America
Campus Partners in Learning/Campus Compact
Career Beginnings, Center for Corporate and Education Initiatives, Heller School, Brandeis University
Connecticut College, Office of Community Service
The Enterprise Foundation
National Urban League, Inc.
University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Office of Professional Practice
One Plus One, WQED-TV

For a full resource list or other information on mentoring, please write:

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The National Mentoring Partnership is an advocate for the expansion of mentoring; a resource for mentors and mentoring initiatives nationwide.

United Way of America Mission: To advance, with member United Way organizations, the nation's health and human service agenda by expanding resources and applying them effectively to build better, more self-sufficient communities.

The National Mentoring Partnership Mission: To increase the availability of responsible personal and economic mentoring for America's children.